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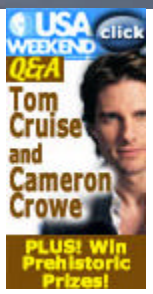

Sunday, December 9, 2001

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Lakes Region market holds some promise

By VICTORIA GUAY

Staff Writer

District 1 Executive Councilor Raymond Burton waves from aboard a train about to depart Laconia at this year's Rail Appreciation Day, held at the end of October. Burton is a strong supporter of increasing rail service in the state, and is looking forward to Friday's inaugural run of Amtrak's Downeaster train on the Boston to Portland line. (Andrea Kehn/staff photo)

While the majority of New Hampshire residents using the new Portland to Boston passenger train service will come from the Seacoast area, some Lakes Region residents say the service will be attractive to people planning pleasure trips to either of the two cities.

"Yes, people from the Lakes Region will partake of the Portland to Boston Amtrak train — for special occasions such as a family anniversary overnight in Portland, which is a great city here in New England, and for the family experience of riding a train with all of the modern day conveniences," said District 1 Executive Councilor Raymond Burton, a proponent of rail travel in the state.

Burton hosts Rail Appreciation Day each year as a way to increase public awareness of trains as a viable mode of transportation.

"It is one of the modes of transportation that has been successful in New Hampshire, particularly with the tourists," Burton said at this year's Rail Appreciation Day, an event which was kicked off in Laconia. Burton added that the popularity of tourist lines such as the Winnipesaukee Rail Road, the Cog Railroad and the Hobo Railroad is evidence of this.

Kimon Koulet of the Lakes Region Planning Commission also thinks the service will be utilized by Lakes Region residents who make frequent trips to the Seacoast and Boston.

Koulet said that it will be probably be used by Lakes Region residents, judging from the travel activity along Route 16.

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"I think people will look at that service with interest," Koulet said.

Currently, he said, the DOT is looking at making improvements in West Ossipee where Route 16 and Route 25 converge. The improvements include a transportation center which might enable a bus service to shuttle passengers from the center to Pease International Trade Port or to downtown Portsmouth.

However, Koulet said he is more interested in the study being conducted right now by the DOT in reopening the Boston to Montreal line, which could come as far north as Concord and Franklin before veering off toward Lebanon, Vermont and Canada.

Malcolm Taylor of Holderness said he's looking forward to the opening of the Portland to Boston line.

"We're very excited about this. It's a more convenient way to get in and out of Boston with all the traffic," Taylor said.

He said another thing he likes about the service is that it goes to the University of New Hampshire. Taylor noted the New England Center on the UNH Campus is a popular conference center and hotel.

Taylor said he thinks people in the Lakes Region will use the service in a limited way, but that it would definitely add an alternative when planning pleasure trips to Boston.

"More importantly, it's gets New Hampshire back into the rail way," Taylor said

Before that, he said, the only active city service rail stop (excluding the tourist lines of the Lakes Region) was a stop in Claremont Junction which comes from Vermont and goes into New York City with no service to Boston.

Taylor said he sometimes makes the trip to Vermont to ride the train into New York City, and he said he will probably drive to the Seacoast to take the train into Boston.

"The Lakes Region is sort of in the middle, we're really waiting for our own rail service," Taylor said.

He added that if a commuter service could be established between Nashua and Boston than it would only be a matter of time before train service was extended to Manchester with the new arena and then to Concord, which would be a real attractive alternative for people in the Lakes Region.

"It's so much nicer to go into Boston and not have to deal with the traffic congestion, the tie-ups and all the stress that goes with it," Taylor said.

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